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MR. BIGELOW'S

O R A T I O N.

JULY 21, 1796.



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A N
O R A T I O N,

PRONOUNCED AT CAMBRIDGE,

BEFORE THE

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AT THEIR

ANNUAL MEETING

O N

THURSDAY, JULY 21, 1796.

IT BEING

THE DAY FOLLOWING THE

PUBLIC COMMENCEMENT.

By TIMOTHY BIGELOW.

BOSTON:
Printed by MANNING & LORING.

1797.

ORATION

PROBATIONER AT CHAIRSIDE

BEFORE THE



AT THEIR

ANNUAL MEETING

ON

THURSDAY, JANUARY, 1890.

AT SEVEN

THE DAY FOLLOWING THE

PUBLIC COMMENCEMENT.



BY TIMOTHY MANNING & LORING.

BOSTON:
TIMOTHY MANNING & LORING.

1890.



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 which have governed the members of it, in pro-
 secution of the design; and the consequences that
 may probably result therefrom. As this has never
 yet been done, so far as my knowledge extends,
 with your permission I will attempt it.

The form of this Institution originated in a
 Sister Seminary to which I was connected.

BRETHREN AND FRIENDS,
 I ADDRESS you with a mixture
 of pleasure and embarrassment,
 It is impossible not to participate
 the general satisfaction which this

anniversary affords; though a want of sufficient
 leisure and opportunity has, I fear, prevented my
 coming forward prepared to satisfy the expecta-
 tions of this respectable auditory, or justify the
 partiality of those who placed me here. But the
 fields of Science have lately been so thoroughly
 explored, and the choicest productions so care-
 fully collected, that to expect a new and rich re-
 past at this time, would be like looking for the
 bounties of Nature in fields where the harvest had
 been gathered.

It is a custom with the Society which is here
 assembled, on the occasion of this anniversary, to
 delegate one or more of its members to deliver a
 public harangue. In discharging this duty, the
 performer has the choice of his theme. It must
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be proper on such an occasion, when friends and strangers out of the Society oblige us with their attendance, to unfold and discuss the motives which led to this establishment; the principles which have governed the members of it, in prosecuting the design; and the consequences that may probably result therefrom. As this has never yet been done, so far as my knowledge extends, with your permission I will attempt it.

The form of this Institution originated in a Sister Seminary to the South, and from thence was *mediately* communicated to this. It was not adopted here with an idea of attaching to its members superior privileges, or arrogating to them an invidious distinction. No expectations were formed that the connexion would afford a dispensation from any of the duties of scholastic life, or independently insure success in the world. But it was well understood that respectability here, and eminence and good fortune through life, were exclusively attached to ability, information and merit. To improve and increase these important qualities, give complete effect to the endeavors of our instructors, more fully accomplish the purposes for which we were placed here by our friends, as well as to cultivate harmony and establish a durable friendship, the plan of the Institution was approved and carried into effect. Experience has confirmed theory; and the utility of the scheme has equalled the expectations of its advocates.

In its prosecution, objects of pursuit and the modes of investigation have been pointed out. These have been such as were either useful in themselves, or as they tended to invigorate and extend the reasoning faculty. A literary accountability to the whole is naturally expected of each of the members ; and hence results, not only industry, but a circumspection of mind, an endeavor at classic purity and correctness, which might otherwise have been neglected. Free communication on all proper subjects is encouraged ; and accurate discussions of particular points enjoined. By this expedient, the stock of information is improved, the ideas are assorted and arranged, and pedantry and hesitation give place to ease and ready resource. The student who confines himself to his closet, and collects his information wholly from the dead letter of his authors, without improving the faculty of communication or an interchange of sentiments and observations, may acquire much learning ; but the mass will be of little more use to him than a treasure deposited under the base of a pyramid.

As the Society was not exclusively connected with one seminary, it was necessary, to prevent mistakes and impositions, as well as for other purposes, to preserve those mysteries and *arcana*, which had been attached to it from its origin. Independent of the many precedents which exist in point, to which we might appeal for an apology, we trust that this consideration will afford to the

the candid a sufficient justification. But a tree, it is said, is to be known by its fruit; and, as we have *endeavored* to approve ourselves to the world, we feel a modest assurance that our Institution will not suffer by an application of the rule. Fifteen years have already elapsed since its first establishment here: During all which time, irregularities of conduct, riot, tumult and disorder have uniformly been discountenanced; and due subordination and a regard to order have been enjoined and practised. Many advantages therefore have resulted to the University, and perhaps to society itself. From a conviction of the utility of the scheme, on all these and various other accounts, the Government of this Seminary have, with great propriety, afforded their patronage and countenance to the Institution.

Some of the general consequences that may probably flow from this establishment are obvious and apparent. The interests of the community are undoubtedly advanced by the information and ability of its members. Nay, a general diffusion of knowledge and literature is thought essentially necessary to the preservation of a free government. This benefit, however, does not fully result to society, unless the powers of the head are connected with goodness of heart. In what consists the difference between a civilized man and a savage? Certainly not more in the improvement of mind, than disposition. Let one, therefore, be enlarged, without a proportional correction of the other,
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and the man will be but a savage still, with greater ability to gratify his uncorrected propensities. Those societies, therefore, must be importantly useful, which make a reciprocal friendship a part of their constitutions. For, it is from the cultivation of private attachments, that we learn to extend our affections to a general philanthropy. It is not to be denied, that some of the benefits which they would produce are happily superseded by the tranquil state of our country, and the mild manners of a polished and enlightened age. Such institutions, especially if they become extensive, are admirably calculated to soften the manners, and ameliorate the condition of mankind, in barbarous or tumultuous times.

The Masonic Establishment, which is of this description, from its antiquity and universality, furnishes the best illustration of this doctrine. Avoiding all the chimerical, or at best, doubtful accounts of a very high antiquity; it is certain that their order existed, and was held in respect, during the latter part of the dark ages. In addition to the refinement of disposition, which the cherishing the mild virtue of friendship always induces; history affords us many instances of the beneficial effects which that establishment produced. The exile, whom differences in religious opinions, revolutions in government, or the chances of war had driven from his country to a foreign land; instead of there finding himself friendless and alone, instead of being exposed to

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the insults and abuse of the unfeeling, or reduced to the sad alternative of menial service, or soliciting a cold charity to obtain a pitiful subsistence ; no sooner did he make known his connexion to any of the fraternity whom he might chance to meet, than he found the bosom of friendship open to receive, the arm of power stretched forth to protect, and the hand of a liberal charity unfolded to support him. The unhappy captive who had fallen into the hands of a ferocious and exasperated enemy, instead of meeting that cruel death, or being condemned to the still more cruel bondage which he expected, is discovered by a brother of the order among the conquerors : Forthwith the fetters are struck from his limbs, the balm of consolation is copiously administered, and he is relieved from his fearful apprehensions. This generous relief was not confined to Masonic Brethren, but often extended to their friends and fellow-sufferers. How grateful is it to observe such instances of humanity and benevolence, breaking forth in times of general barbarism and depravity of manners ! The gem of friendship shines with a brighter, a diviner ray, in proportion to the general gloom of the times in which it is found.

Unacquainted with the secrets of Masonry, I state no other instance of analogy between that order and ours, but that of a fraternal attachment to each other. But certain I am that a cultivation of the tender and social affections, and the consequent

consequent extension of our benevolence to a general philanthropy, is the most important, the most honorable principle that any fraternity can profess. If ever this was a secret, thank God, it is now rapidly developing, or is already unfolded to society at large.

Comparing the state of mankind with what it was scarce more than a century ago, how immensely is it improved ! In many countries, instead of laws which authorised the governments to seize the property of an unfortunate stranger, who should die within their jurisdiction, however just the claims of his relations or others might be ; or to strip from the wretches who were wrecked on their coasts, the remnant of their property which the rage of the elements had spared ; instead of the barbarous custom of coolly murdering or condemning to slavery the unhappy captives, whom the fortune of war, or even a violation of the rights of hospitality had brought within their power ; we find laws providing for the support of the distressed of every description ; societies established and countenanced by government for the relief of the unfortunate. In times of peace, most countries are open for the free admission and departure of strangers ; and their equal right to protection and relief is acknowledged : And in time of war, excepting some partial instances of cruelty, which have unfortunately stained the history of our own times ; if any one fall into the hands of his enemy, the danger

ger of his life ceases with his resistance ; he is treated with politeness, and allowed all the conveniences and comforts of life. In a short time he is liberated on his simple parole, or exchanged unhurt ; or, on the conclusion of a peace, is dismissed without a ransom. Wars in general are no longer personal, but national : And though individuals discharge their duty with gallantry in the field ; yet they have none of that private animosity and rancor which formerly armed that destructive evil with double terror.

In this picture, which is undoubtedly just with respect to much the greater part of what is termed the civilized world, it must be highly satisfactory to observe that our own country stands in the foreground. Mildness and benevolence are ruling principles in all our governments : Philanthropy is both honored and practised by the great body of our citizens. The poor are provided for by standing laws ; and the unfortunate often relieved by particular acts of munificence. Individuals also have uniformly discovered alacrity and zeal to avert the dangers with which others were threatened, and have liberally contributed to repair unmerited misfortunes. Societies have been formed for the kind reception and friendly treatment of such foreigners as seek an asylum in our happy country ; others, to restore persons apparently dead to life and the embraces of their anxious friends. Many similar establishments do honor to our country. When engaged in war,

no American was ever known to take the life of the unresisting or unarmed ; and the kindness and humanity with which our magnanimous armies, though often exasperated by cruelties which had been practised on their countrymen, always treated their prisoners, extorted praises from their enemies themselves. What other people can exhibit an example of a complete revolution achieved, both in the form and the administration of government, or of rebellions effectually suppressed, where no blood has been spilled on account of the opinion of individuals, or the side of the controversy merely, which they espoused ? Far hence be the time, when either foreign war or internal commotion shall again call for the exercise of these magnanimous virtues ; but still let us cherish, and be ready to put them in practice, if the sad necessity should ever re-exist.

Though humanity and benevolence be justly a part of our national character ; yet, as other nations are behind us, so we have not arrived at perfection. There still remains a wide field for the exercise of a generous ambition. To revise, and mitigate in many cases, our codes of criminal law, by endeavoring to make a reformation of the offender, instead of his extirpation, the object of punishment ; to transform our common places of confinement from seminaries of wickedness and villany into schools of morality ; to liberate the unhappy Africans from the horrors of a slavery equally unjust and inhuman ; to promote
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an interchange of good offices, and a mild and pacific disposition among mankind ; objects like these are worthy the pursuit of the noblest minds. Some of them have already immortalized the names of PENN, HOWARD, and WILBERFORCE. Shall we be deterred, shall we shrink in despair from objects of such magnitude ? Is it chimerical to indulge a hope that even we may bear a conspicuous part in this noble pursuit ? No ; remembering that, in such a cause, it is much more honorable to lead than to follow ; we will lend our individual assistance, as circumstances may permit, and endeavor to give a tone to the public opinion. If one man, by his personal exertion, could alleviate the distresses of thousands, scattered through all the countries of Europe, nay, could gladden even the horrors of the East ; what may not numbers achieve ? It is true we are yet comparatively few : But our number, both here and elsewhere, is continually increasing. Our Institution is now confined to a few seminaries in this country : But what obstacle exists to its further extension ? or even to a communication of it to foreign universities ? in many of which, establishments of this kind have heretofore found a cordial support. Let us remember also, that in the practice of philanthropy, which is far from being the least important object of our association, we shall act in concert with many other respectable institutions, and meet the concurrence of a generous public. With due exertion, therefore,
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even of a few, in various places and different walks of life, the great current of opinion may be directed into proper channels, and its ramifications reach every object of compassion. When the beneficial effects of a general spirit of humanity shall be observed here, it will readily be adopted abroad. Our country has already taught the world the true science of government, and the art to be free. She exhibits the example of a great people flourishing and happy, among whom, to the surprise of other nations, gradations in rank, and exclusive rights, are entirely unknown. Why then shall we not instruct the species in the arts of humanity, and the science of universal friendship? Is this general diffusion of philanthropy mere chimera and extravagance? If it be, I could almost wish that we might still cherish the delusion. For what but the reality could be more grateful to benevolent minds, than a confident anticipation that the whole world would become a common country to each individual; that mankind would be but one family, by practice, as well as extraction; and thereby taste on Earth, the joys of Heaven itself?

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